

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time – January 21/22, 2017 – Umbrella of Life Homily II

There are, I'm sure, many stains on our national conscience, but one of the biggest and darkest centers around the "Peculiar Institution" ... slavery. Slaveholders tried to build a moral and cogent argument for a practice that kidnapped people from their homes and villages across the ocean, transported them in chains and squalor in the bowels of ships, paraded them around like pieces of meat, sold them to the highest bidder with no care to keep family units intact, worked them and whipped them and degraded them and tried to keep them in ignorance, until the life and the usefulness was wrung out of them. All this was justified as being supported in the *Good Book* itself. After all, Abraham had slaves, the Ten Commandments spoke of the reality of slavery when commanding not to covet one's manservant or maidservant, Jesus was aware of slavery in the Roman Empire but did not speak out against the practice, and St. Paul even returned a runaway slave Philemon to his rightful master. Our highest judicial body, the Supreme Court in the Dred Scott Decision held that "all Blacks - not just slaves - had no legal standing as persons in our courts - they were property, and the Constitution protected slave holders' rights to their property. Southern defenders of slavery congratulated themselves for their beneficence contending that, compared to the poor of Europe and sweatshop workers of the North, slaves were better cared for because, as property, they were more valuable.

In the bloody 20th Century, the brain trust of Germany's National Socialist Movement, the Nazi Party, argued in much the same vein calling Slavs, Romani (Gypsies), homosexuals, the mentally and physically challenged, and, of course, the Jews as being sub-human, deviant and broken, a plague on society, vermin and filth and so, their de-humanizing philosophy led to a Holocaust where millions of lives were snuffed out because a few people didn't deem them worthy of existence.

In our day, word is beginning to reach the West of children being brainwashed in terrorist training camps and centers to become suicide bombers for the cause: at a wedding in Gaziantep, Turkey 51 were killed, 22 of them under the age of 14. The suicide bomber was a boy between 12 and 14; in Kirkuk, Iraq, police foiled an attack where an individual had a 2 kilo bomb strapped to his skinny frame, the kid was a boy of 14; in Afghanistan a Taliban trained 14 year old used his bike to ride into a Kabul NATO base where he detonated a body bomb that killed himself and six others; again in Kabul a young teenager blew himself up at the French Cultural Center intending to take many others with him; in West Africa, Boko Haram prey on captured children and especially young girls and force them to become bombers ... last year alone, there were 38 child suicide bombers in that country; in Iraq and Syria, ISIS takes children from towns it captures and indoctrinates them to become the "Cubs of the Caliphate"; in the two year period from 2014-2016, attacks employing child suicide bombers rose four-fold under Boko Haram in Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, and Chad ... nearly two-thirds were young girls.

And, children are threatened in other ways besides turning them into weapons of terror. In Madaya, Syria, constant daily bombings from the

air and a siege that has as its goal to starve the townsfolk into submission, in the past two months, children have given up rather than live such a horrible life: 6 children have taken their own lives rather than face another day of hunger and fear. Around the world, Unicef reports that there are 50 million children who are refugees and migrants, homeless and nearly hopeless because no one seems to want them, except those who would train them to be killers.

How horrible! What a sin! Shameful! Despicable! How can people so throw away, so scar and misuse beautiful children? How can those animals have not even the slightest regard for human life? How can people live with themselves as they throw away their own kids?

In our country, how many tens of millions of lives have been crushed before they ever had the chance to see the light of day, simply because they were not persons under the law, they were property of the carrier, they were inconvenient? Isn't it the same?

In our country, how many have been denied entry as they seek refuge from violence and poverty because they are not the right kind of people for the country, kind of sub-human? Isn't it the same?

In our country, how many of the sick and elderly and injured have been offered the mercy to end it all and get out of the way of the young and the healthy and the valuable? Isn't it the same?

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said: "He who accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it. He who accepts evil without protesting against it is really cooperating with it."

What shall we do, brothers and sisters? In most parishes, the Respect Life groups are small and at the fringes of the parish life, not really on

the radar for most of the people. But unless more of us pray with a bigger part of our hearts; unless more of us open our minds to learn of the assaults on life that are going on all around us; unless more of us are finally willing to put some skin in the game and act to right wrongs and counter evil with good so as to defend my brother, my sister; unless more of us are willing to do something and not whistle past the graveyard, the fragile Umbrella of Life will become more and more tattered and the dealers of lies and death will have won.

What shall we do, brothers and sisters???